

Music in Teaching Religion in Primary Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Many authors have sought to define singing in school as a strong weapon that has the power to influence the moods of the child. Others have even shown that deeper enjoyment derives from involvement and learning in music. Children, in fact, are much influenced by the world of music. Singing is the most fundamental means of musical expression.¹ It is enjoyable and purposeful, and should produce fun and delight.² Children respond with great enthusiasm to song. They enjoy it, and they integrate themselves in it because it gives them a deeper meaning to life.³

Children possess the ability to be absorbed and overwhelmed by involvement, especially by rhythm.⁴ Song has a unique way of achieving what words cannot do. Song enwraps and uncovers the spiritual dimension of human experience. Song enables children to enter into a sphere of reality, which differs in some way, from ordinary life, because it is beyond or above them.⁵ There is an ultimate need for communication: song is the dynamic force used by children, to reach out to the

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Marlene Gatt. Holds B.Ed. (Hons) from the University of Malta. Undertook primary research in the role of music in education to primary school children. Teaches primary school children.

1. S. Hennessy, *Coordinating Music Across the Primary School*, (Falmer Press; London 1998).
2. J. Mills, *Music In The Primary School*, (Cambridge Press; Cambridge 1995).
3. R. Scrutton, *The Aesthetic of Music*, (Oxford University Press; Oxford 1997).
4. P. Salaman, *Living School Music*, (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge 1983).
5. H. Smith, *The Really Practical Guide to Primary Religious Education*, (Stanley Thornes; England 1996).

outer world. Teaching of song conveys enthusiasm, when produced by the correct dynamics and texture.⁶ Therefore, communication through song, becomes a process of creating, sharing and conveying understanding.⁷

This paper is based on research undertaken over the period 1997-9 by Marlene Gatt as an integral part of her dissertation "Presenting the Person and the Message of Jesus Through Song for Primary School Children", which research was oriented towards the design of music and lyrics to accompany a Roman Catholic religion textbook used in local schools.⁸

THE ART OF SONG

Development of Children's Song

It was only towards the eighteenth century that there was a drive to understand children; the period when the rudiments of child psychology as known today started to emerge. Structural theorists like Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg and Fowler, brought to light the importance of how children should be motivated. Children, they argued, enthusiastically work, play and do things, especially when they are engaged in activities that call for creativity and learning from the physical environment. These activities are engrossed in music, dance, art, and theatre.⁹ Through these arts, creative activity takes place and produces various forms of self-development. The child is exposed to openness, expression, assertion, belongingness, wisdom and knowledge.

Music has the power of shaping and moulding the spiritual dimension of the child. According to Haas, music is one of our best and most effective teachers.¹⁰ When the Christian message of love, peace, justice and forgiveness is sung, it has the power to penetrate the child's memory. Moreover, for children, the little and the insignificant is the most important factor. Mellers insists on the beauty of the

6. M.R. Jalongo, "Using Recorded Music with Young Children: A Guide For Nonmusicians", *Pre-K Today* 51(5) (1996) 17-21.
7. P. Mitchell, "Why Care about stories?: A story of Narrative Art", *British Journal of Religious Education* 86/1 (1991) 90-101.
8. M. Gatt, *Presenting the Person and the Message of Jesus Through Song for Primary School Children*, (Unpublished Dissertation; University of Malta 1999) 19-32.
9. P. Bumbar, "To Know God.....but how?", *Journal of Religious Education* 86/1 (1991) 129-132.
10. R. Haas (Ed.), "Music Education and the Parish: A Dream", *Pastoral Music in Practice: Children, Liturgy and Music* 2 (1990) 111-115.

'new' and the 'little'.¹¹ Small is beautiful but great. Within such dimensions, song is recognised as an integral part in the formation of children, to develop their faith in everyday living.

The Educational Impact of Song

If children's interest is to be stimulated and sustained, then activities have to be relevant to their own situations and be able to meet their own needs.¹² Furthermore, any form of activity can reach the essence of a child's world. A child is receptive. Learning takes place through ways and means which we, adults, fail to understand. So much so, children receive messages in the talk and behaviour of all those around them.¹³ A child possesses a natural instinct to respond to the various forces of imagination and fantasy. These can be considered as relevant tools incorporating well within the creative spectrum of music, found in the expression of emotion.

Song can be effective in various ways. Two main issues have been selected to delineate the effect of song, which range from personal effectiveness to classroom effectiveness. The first issue shows how song has the power to stretch a child's memorising power. An interesting statement, brought out by Young and Glover underlines another perspective that brings out the importance of song.¹⁴ They state that singing leaves sensations and memory at all stages. Children express themselves through singing and movement.

In 'wonder and awe', children do not grasp for information or explanation but lapse into a contemplative attitude involving reverence and a willingness to appropriate.¹⁵ Here, the child's sense of wonder is roused by sensing the mystery of life. Therefore, the child, without being aware of it, is more liable to withhold the mystic and holiness of what is evoked through the Person of Jesus. There is a combination of two precious tools that together can provoke and produce an ultimate response. This response characterises the vivid awareness of its need to assimilate

11. W. Mellers, *Between Old Worlds and New: Occasional Writings on Music*, (Golden Cockerel Press; London 1997).
12. M. Grimmitt, *Religious Education and Human Development*, (McCrimmons; Essex 1987).
13. D. Sullivan, & J.S.D.B. Gallagher, *Religious Education: The Primary Years Promise and Potential for the Way Ahead*, (Collins Liturgical Publications; London 1990).
14. S. Young & J. Glover, *Music In The Early Years*, (The Falmer Press; London 1998).
15. A. Proffit, "Theological and Educational Significance of Wonder. The Importance of Wonder in Educational Ministry", *Religious Education* 93/1, (1998) 107-110.

the Message of Jesus in a new dimension. In fact, it is vital and important that children develop their skills for selecting and focusing attention.

The second issue reveals the children's need of belongingness, where they find pleasure in socialising and sharing.¹⁶ For young children, language, music and movement go hand in hand. Therefore, when they come in contact with music, they respond to action and exploration. Children enjoy being together, having fun and making the best out of it, especially where there is something new to be learned.

They explore the elements of mood, rhythm and form, common to both music and language. Together, they feel the strength of what is going on in and around them. Song brings children together, and stimulates more desire to keep on sharing together through this warm experience. Children also share ideas and feelings, in ways that require few spoken words. As a result, singing increases their joy in the classroom.¹⁷

Integrating Song in the Classroom

Song can be integrated in class in several ways. It could be used to reinforce a concept or introduce a new one; it could even end an activity or start one.¹⁸ The challenge to use something new is always valid for children. Songs, when used well, can render teaching more effective. Cram has noted that, when a song becomes part of a child, its repetition takes an ultimate concern, especially when sung in class.¹⁹ Moreover, Brahemy argues that repetition not only makes a song works and impress, but it also builds familiarity to the mind.²⁰ The importance of experience through song is a necessary quality to educate the child.²¹

It is essential that songs take on various forms, like echo songs, catchy refrains, simple tunes. There are songs that lead themselves to dramatisation or interpretative movement. In such a way, important issues are well taught and integrated, and

16. A.S. Honig, "The Power of Song", *Pre-K Today* 7/4 (1993) 42-43.

17. A.S. Honig, "Singing with Infants and Toddlers", *Young Children* 50(5) (1995) 72-78.

18. L. Bufano, "Music and Education: The Sky's the Limit", *Pastoral Music in Practice: Children Liturgy and Music* 2 (1990) 121-126.

19. R.H. Cram, "Knowing God: Children, Play, and Paradox", *Journal of Religious Education* 91/1 (1996) 55-60.

20. J. Brahemy, *The craft and business of song writing*, (Writers Digest Book; U.S.A.1987).

21. B. Watson, *The Effective Teaching of Religious Education*, (Longman; London 1993).

children learn how to build on their own experience. Therefore, they can associate this experience with their inner world of beauty and divinity, which is inherently religious and spiritual. In fact, when a teacher embarks on venturing to teach in creative ways, especially through song, s/he is sure to succeed.²²

Another important factor involved here, is the effect of sound that re-echoes in the hidden world of a child's inner life. Song and movement, which emphasize the vitality of sound, create vivid discoveries when their imagination is stimulated. Song, then, acquires the same importance as the sound it produces in rhythm.²³ It is interesting to note that, usually, children reflect the expression the teacher does or say. However, in song, children no longer abide to this pattern of behaviour. Rather, their behaviour is manifested differently. The emotional connotations song presents, become the supreme expression of universal emotions.²⁴

In their study, Maxwell and Timmins have noted another extraordinary behaviour in children.²⁵ They argue that children are great copiers. However, they found that children assume an identity of their own to the language of music, which is unknown to us, adults. It is precisely at this wavelength that any religious concept can be conveyed. At this point, song becomes the essential medium to attract a message within a purely spiritual dimension. This momentary passage, creates a unique beauty within the classroom, where awe and wonder are infused by the permeating energy of music and song.

Song, then, becomes the most wonderful experience a child can freely live, to express and share his hidden world. A child is restored into wholeness - a wholeness where a community is formed, where everyone is happy, joyfully sharing and experiencing the wonder of song. Storr remarks that music has indeed influenced the world of a solitary life, and it has rendered human nature into wholeness.²⁶ Children possess great faith, especially where there is a vivid awareness of life and

22. C.W. McLoy, "Factors Relating to Pitch-Matching Skills of Elementary Education Majors", *Journal of Research in Music Education* 45 (3) (1997) 89-97.
23. J. Gilbert, *Musical Starting Points With Young Children*, (WardLock Educational; London 1981).
24. D. Cooke, *The Language of Music*, (Oxford University Press; Oxford 1989).
25. D. Maxwell & T. Timmins, *Teaching Music In Primary Schools*, (Schofield & Sons; England 1986).
26. A. Storr, *Music and the Mind*, (Collins; London 1992).

death. Within this mystic sphere, they are able to enter the aesthetic transition of music.²⁷ Likewise, they are able to celebrate and be joyful.

The Kinaesthetic Approach

Every song presented to the class, has an important and specific role, that is, to create a human and habitable world. Within this ring of creativity, music brings peace and tranquillity, and relieves stress in its simplest form.²⁸

In the inner web of kinaesthetic movement, children focus on the totality of their body and soul, as a source of spiritual knowledge. They are keenly introduced to probe and investigate their identity and to delight in other form of creativity. Nye and May support the knowledge that the awareness of things beyond one's current understanding is very familiar in song.²⁹ These are impressive moments which will never be forgotten.

The kinaesthetic pose of music creates a new way of presenting its reality. A child hears notes in a different way, in a different combination, and seeks to feel rhythm in ways it had never done before. Kavanagh comments that in pastoral music, the truly beautiful never shackles the human spirit; rather, it always foresees it.³⁰ Mitchell describes this as stretching the human imagination about God.³¹ Children are invited to think, wonder and breath God with their bodies, skins and ears and not merely with the mind. It is defined as an acoustic environment in which the mystery of God can be explored.

Serjak contemplates the beauty of this fathomless activity of song in children.³² A child, first listens, drawn by the exciteness of its newness. Then, instantly carefully

27. M. Krauss, *The Interpretation of Music: Philosophical Essays*, (Clarendon Press; Oxford 1995).

28. J. Glover & S. Ward, *Teaching Music In the Primary School: A Guide for Primary Teachers*, (Cassell; London 1993).

29. R. Nye & D. May, "Identifying Children's Spirituality: How do You start Without a Starting Point?", *British Journal of Religious Education* 18/3 (1996) 144-154.

30. A. Kavanagh, "Eastern Lessons on Liturgical Music", *Pastoral Music* 12/3 (1988) 68-69.

31. N. Mitchell, "The Musician As Minister", *Pastoral Music in Practice: The Pastoral Musician* 5 (1990) 3-18.

32. C.R.S.M. Serjak, "The Musician: Transformed Through Excellence", *Pastoral Music in Practice: The Pastoral Musician* 5 (1990) 49-59.

examines the song, expands it and allows him/herself to become absorbed and lured into space and time. By now, Serjak concludes, the child has been changed.

THE STUDY

Aim The objective of this paper is to test the validity of music and lyrics designed to accompany religious education to Year 3 primary school children using the religion textbook *Lejn il-Missier*.³³ The lyrics and songs were designed to create a sense of value and meaning. They were designed to sustain the aims of the various chapters of the textbook. The study was based on 44 Year 3 children from two schools: on class from a Church school and another from a public school.

The Songs

28 songs have been written and composed, each song was based on the objectives of each chapter of the book. The teacher's guide *Lejn il-Missier: Gwida għall-ghalliema tar-religjon tat-tielet klassi fl-iskejjel primarji* was extensively used to help comprehend the objectives of each chapter.³⁴ The various chapter headings, which follow the liturgical calendar, were conveniently classified accordingly as outlined in Table 1.

Approach and Techniques

The songs were composed using different music style and texture, to emphasise the message of Jesus and His Person. Action songs, narrative songs, Bible Sing Along, songs of Praise and Community song were used.

The study covered 28 weeks; chapter a week. Each chapter is projected to be covered over three lessons. Thus, the study was designed to involve three phases in this order: the presentation of songs, a questionnaire, and interviews. Each phase was to be covered in any one lesson.

The first phase commenced with the playing of the song which was pre-recorded on tape by a group of Year 3 children which children did not take part in the study. The children listened to the recorded song three times. They were then given the

33. Kummissjoni Kateketika Nazzjonali, *Lejn il-Missier*, 3, (Kummissjoni Kateketika Nazzjonali; Malta 1985).

34. Kummissjoni Kateketika Nazzjonali, *Lejn il-Missier: Gwida għall-ghalliema tar-religjon tat-tielet klassi fl-iskejjel primarji*.

lyrics of the song and together with the teacher, they read them. Later, they were invited to underline words or phrases which they liked. Following this activity, the children were asked to share their thoughts. When the sharing took place, the song was sung again

The second phase, the questionnaire, included three questions. The first involved marking yes or no while the other two, and occasionally three as stated in Table 2, were open-ended and related to the theme of the song itself.

The third phase dealt with interviewing the children in groups of four, called alphabetically as per class register. The interviews were held outside the classroom setting, in a room adjacent to the class. The interviewer carried out the sessions in an informal way to achieve more participation and spontaneity from the children. Furthermore, prompts were made to ensure support and encouragement in every child.

RESULTS AND OBSERVATIONS

A sample of 17 songs was selected: 7 for duration one, 8 for duration two, and 2 for duration 3. Results obtained from interviews are given in Table 2.

Songs for Duration One

In song 1, the children were carried away by the joyful swing of the music, encompassed in the strong rhythmic pattern and dynamic texture of tempo. The children were able to create a happy environment and surrounding that was able to inspire and animate them. Kinaesthetic movement had a great effluence on behaviour that each child responded in a delightful manner, bringing out natural impulses of body movement.

Children showed their delight by their spontaneity and truthfulness. Their understanding of the message manifested a thorough broadness of the power of song. They discovered Jesus as their greatest friend.

In song 2, the children felt the difference of rhythm. In fact, a few of them did not manage to integrate well with it. Nonetheless, they abandoned themselves to the slow rhythmic pattern of the song, while their enthusiasm attained extraordinary depths of exultation in the refrain. The tone colour of the song helped to reinforce

the refrain. This refined their ability to join in, to the swinging movement of the song.

A dubious image of uncertainty was formed for a few could not understand the message which was too abstract for them. However, most of the children well understood it, without any difficulty. The narrative pattern bounced like a story, and children listened eagerly to join in the refrain. The length and duration of the song was absorbed by the description of places Jesus went to. The Mission of Jesus reflected throughout, and the children became immersed with singing the words, while letting go to their natural actions. Nonetheless, the children understood what Jesus did and where He went.

The tranquil nature and peaceful pace experienced in song 4 brought a new encounter to the children. The style of this song is totally different from the previous ones. In fact, a small group did not take a liking to it. They joined in, rather reluctantly. The children responded in a progressive and sensitive manner. The contour of melody created a successive mode of sequences that reached a climax of contemplation, mingled with harmonic phrases of the melody. Those that did not respond well to it could not be absorbed by the harmony of the song. For them, this music texture did not attract their interest. In fact, they needed stronger elements of sound and dynamics.

In song 6, the children found themselves in an elated sense of harmony. The theme was too abstract for them to transmit it into everyday language. The slow rhythmic pattern of the music, created a different atmosphere for the children. The classroom setting was transformed into a blissful and heavenly milieu. There was a sense of expectation and of profound silence where each child waited for something to happen.

The meaning of the message was lucent and the majority of the children internalised it. They could step into this form of enlightenment to bridge what they have learned to their own experience. However, to others, it brought about, quite a contrast of words and understanding. They could not assimilate it.

In song 7, the majority of the children enjoyed singing. They manifested freedom of movement and expression. Voices rang out loud and joyfully to the music, and often, their words were not always clear. Some joined, half through, with babbling of words. Their response to cadence and tempo was correct and successful. The

refrains proved to be the strongest focal point of the song. Moreover, the children reached a sense of deep awareness to the message of Jesus. Their assimilation, which found an echo, revealed a truth concerning their happiness.

Song 10 gave the children a warm and comfortable setting. A song that roused joy, exuberance and enthusiasm by its narrative style. All the children enjoyed the expressive contours of tempo and harmony. The narration song, which was comely and agreeable, facilitated the learning of the song. Phrases and contour of music, enhanced repetition of words in order to sustain the message. The dynamics of the song gave a sense of gentleness and tenderness. This performance produced a sacred and mystic surrounding endowed of what was to happen in the life of Mary. The message was reached in the most delicate form of involvement. Children brought forward their own knowledge, transmitting it into a new found occurrence of celebration and discovery.

All the children accepted Song 11, which produced a sense of exultation and celebration. There was a deep interaction of compliance and understanding. The rhythmic pattern produced complete participation and sharing, even with those who are slow, and reluctant to share their feelings. Children, here, have shown that they are alive both to the music and to the message of the lyrics.

Songs for Duration Two

The rhythmic pattern of song 12 is calm and moving. Most of the children responded in a peaceful manner. However, there were some that became restless during the singing, due to the slow rhythmic pattern and style. The texture of the song was enriched by dynamics and contours to produce a strong effect on the children's emotions. The climax of the song was reached in the refrain. The message was received well, although it caused a remote and complex reaction in some children.

Song 13 reflects a moderate rhythmic pattern and style. The children responded strongly to the kinaesthetic movement of the song. Tempo was enhanced throughout by joyful sighs and gasps. With the form of repetition, the dynamics were expressive and condensed throughout, with an intense harmonic influx. The message was clear and relevant for the children's daily life.

The rhythm of song 14 demonstrates a rhythmic pattern, which satisfies the children's expectations. Melody was dynamic and integrated easily with the children's urge to sing joyfully to the tempo, while their bodies and voices responded

heartily to the fine texture. The expressive qualities of the music brought the dynamics in consonance with the style and rhythm of the harmonics. Children were absorbed by the story of Zaccheus. They felt a sense of relief and contentment to what Jesus did to him. This song was enthusiastically welcomed as a role play, wherein the children became involved with the events that took place.

The contour of melody 15 is deeply enriched in harmony. The children formed an ostinato group, where repetitive phrases were continuously enhanced by their rhythmic pattern. The form of this song helped the sequences of repetition to strengthen the importance of the words, in order to understand more the message of Jesus. The person of Jesus appeared as a warm and loving person. Children were fascinated by this humane figure and wanted to demonstrate their gratitude and appreciation by singing joyfully to Him.

The music and lyrics of song 16 helped to produce a language pattern of style and melody, in which children were able to manifest their feelings. Movement, in fact, was strongly performed. The texture of the song highlighted the responses of the children. They responded well to the dynamics of the song, giving an excellent interpretation of the loud and soft expressive quality. Tone colour brought them close to the environmental setting, which reflected the message of the song. The message of friendship between Jesus and the children was reinforced. Each child showed a sense of determination in maintaining the conviction of being loved by Jesus.

The emphasis of song 18 is in the repetitive phrase of the first line. The music involves a gradual ascending of pitch level to reach a distinctive climax of conviction and assurance. The music alternates with colourful sequences in which every word is given particular texture and style to accentuate the meaning of the message.

Song 20 had an astounding effect on the children. The rhythmic pattern and style produced a different format of singing. It developed into a singing game, with the calling of the apostles' names. The children quite enjoyed it, counting the names that followed. The melodic contours had high and low sounds, followed by several steps and leaps. Verse and refrain brought expectation and excitement throughout. The dynamics of the song were enhanced with tempo, keeping up with the exuberance of the children. The idea of the message was clear enough. Children showed a deep awareness of what entails love towards God: a love mingled with respect and adoration towards what is holy and divine.

Song 22 was enriched with smooth passages that revealed a sense of wonder and freedom in the children that made them achieve an elated climax. The children's performance showed an ability to express themselves through movement. They were completely involved with the affective aspects of knowing and learning. This was explored thoroughly by the children and they ventured into the kinaesthetic activities with their voices, their bodies and their own feelings. The rhythmic pattern was strong, yet delicate and brought to various styles of dynamics, thus expressing the several qualities of tempo. Tone colour was mixed with the duration of meter, which largely affected the emotions of the children.

Songs for Duration Three

Song 24 brought joy and delight to every child in the class. The children were totally engrossed by the rhythmic movement of song. The joyful expressions wrought in the kinaesthetic movement, emphasised the importance of the Message.

The children wanted to celebrate His presence, by singing the song continuously. Sometimes, their joy was so acute, that they gave the impression that they were actually seeing Him.

In song 25, children showed a remarkable eagerness to learn the song. They were enchanted by the Word of God. However, what was extraordinary, was the way words were repeated in song. The rhythmic style and textures were flowing but their eager responses emphasised certain phrases of the song.

DISCUSSION

During the process of the study, it became evident that the children were able to become involved in every song presented to them. What has basically come out is the significance of rhythm and lyrics, that always intensifies human experience, and always engages in human feelings.³⁵ The production of the songs, which created an organisation of tonality and texture, produced, to some degree, a mixture of repetition and variation in which emotional forces are activated and directed towards one specific goal: in this case, presenting the Person of Jesus and His Message. Furthermore, the presentation of the songs were based on an important element in the life of the child; the forces of imagination and fantasy. These, in turn, have

35. B. Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education*, (Prentice Hall; New Jersey 1970).

been challenged and animated throughout by the variety of music contours and expressive qualities of each song.

The structure of all the songs were built on important keys that eventually developed into a flowing format. Children were able to respond to the regularity of an inner pulse, which co-ordinates movement. This pulse responds intensely to music language in various rhythmic patterns.³⁶ The influence of such patterns was efficacious to the point of creating a harmonic blend between the child and the song.

Tune and rhythm were presented in an attractive manner so that each child would be able to apprehend the song easily and thus enjoy it. Secondly, songs were not too long, but balanced. Thirdly, songs would include a chorus, so that all children would be encouraged to participate, including the shy ones. Fourthly, songs were to lead themselves to movements, giving children a more sense of involvement. Fifthly, they were meant to provide tuneful melodies, with charming lyrics for children so that they can follow easily the message of each song.

One basic argument was to find the right tool to present Jesus in an original way, yet keeping to an environment, which the children know and understand. The first important issue to discuss is the musical effect on the children. The use of repetition was vital in this form. It served to create a learning style more musical and efficient. In so doing, the children were able to recognise the pattern of each song. In fact, songs that had repetitions were the ones that were liked most. Children were thus able to memorise quickly and sing heartily with every song.

Another important issue, deals with the expression of emotion in song. Children showed great emotional feelings, while they reacted to each step, texture and melodic contour. They were thrown in a contrasted web of feelings and expressions, which reverberated with emotions.³⁷ Children were also able to transform the received sounds of the music into emotional experience. Each child, in his own manner and style, was able to sing every song and sense the flow of melody. Thus, in music the relationship between pattern and meaning can produce deep insights into the art of listening.³⁸ In this way, there is a manifestation of the power of music, experienced

36. S. Hennessy, *Music 7-11: Developing Primary Teaching skills*, (Routledge; London 1995).

37. L.C. Edwards, *Affective Development and the Creative Arts: A Process Approach to Early Childhood Education*, (Merrill Publishing; London 1990).

38. L.B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, (University of Chicago Press; London 1996).

in momentary occurrence. Moreover, when songs are performed through echo songs, responsorial and dialogue songs, or ostinato songs, then children are more influenced by the wave of music language.³⁹

Emotions are important in the life of a child. However, worship and praise are other two important factors that enrapture the child in a complete different world. During each song, children were involved in developing qualities of openness, empathy, and imaginative thinking. Such faculties, as reported by Jackson and Starkings, are richly engrossed with intuitive, concrete and abstract thinking, and consequently help to assimilate and grasp the essence of each message.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Bastide remarks that in praise and worship, children increase their sensitivity to search for meaning in the face of life's mysteries.⁴¹ Throughout each song, each child was able to share this unique response, which was gathered through the effect of song.

Another important aspect in this study, is the coming together of the children. Singing together brings mirth and play, especially when song is presented in various forms. The teacher, therefore, has to take into account the various abilities and differences in order to stimulate the children.⁴² Apart from being effective, song provides an enjoyable and controlled activity. In fact there was a shared awareness of friendship and loyalty between the children during singing that enabled them to respond freely and effectively to each song. They plunged into the rhythmic pattern of each, often delighted and exulted with joy.

Wonder and awe in the children were manifested during particular moments of their singing. Their interest in learning a song brought out their simplicity of having discovered something new and fascinating. The child, from within, lives with the unexplained. In several instances, the message of certain songs seemed too abstract; yet, it is rightful to say, that the children were able to internalise the message. When they responded, their response came from within. In fact, music that brings together body and spirit, becomes deeply meaningfully in the young child.⁴³

39. M.E. Junda, "Part Singing Revisited", *Music Educators Journal* 83/6, (1997) 35-40.

40. R. Jackson & D. Starkings (Eds), *The Junior Religious Education Handbook*, (Stanley Thornes; Chellehem 1990).

41. D. Bastide, *Good Practice in Primary Religious Education*, (Falmer Press; London 1992).

42. C. Krjiacou, *Effective Teaching In Schools*, (Stanley Thornes; Chellehem 1997).

43. R. Jacobs, *Music For Young Children*, (Hawthorn Stroud Press; England 1991).

During the interviews, the children showed a limited way of answering. When singing, they were able to communicate more freely what they were experiencing. They lived it. Therefore, this mystic knowledge which is innate in them, confirmed a deep reality which is vital in the lives of children.

Throughout this medium of song, the child, is inferred with an identity to the language of music. Children, from an early age, show a tendency towards space and sound which nurtures a young child's intrinsic love of learning. Groom & Permian show that when children express their feelings within their environments, it sustains and encourages their intellectual growth.⁴⁴ Music, in itself, has paved the way for communication between the outside world and the hidden world of the child. Music, has therefore, become, an asset which can convey something significant and meaningful.

In their answers to both the questionnaires and interviews, each child answered directly and straight to the point. Their awareness of each message had become part of their identity and reality, and they found meaning in singing the tunes. There were a few songs to which a small group of children did not respond well. Their particular choice on this type of songs showed what was appealing to them or not. On the other hand, children were not always wholly successful in their attempt to relate what they heard about Jesus. In some instances, they were unable to grasp clearly the message of the song. Rhythmic pattern did affect their decision on song. The few, who did not feel integrated with the songs, were unable to share their ideas clearly.

The majority of the songs were influential and effective, because of their rhythmic pattern. When tempo was fast and joyful, children responded willingly in singing. Songs that were short in words, using repetition in sequence, proved to be the easiest way for children to learn. Other forms of songs were in the narrative style and the children were charmed by them. So much so that their attention was in full swing with their listening skills, being sharp and accurate to the utmost.

The variety of music style and texture offered every child a possibility to demonstrate his/her feelings and emotions. In some songs, excitement and thrill prevailed. In others, the doing demanded a melancholy and dismal response, while

44. J.E. Gromko and A.S. Poorman, "The Effect of Music Training on Preschoolers: Spatial-temporal task performance", *Journal of Research in Music Education* 46(2), (1998) 341-3.

there were other moments that required a great deal of gladness, which led the children into rapture. Indeed, working with children entails hard work, yet, the power of song has wrought a wonderful enrichment in their lives.

Experiencing Jesus through Song

Children are so easily enveloped in their state of wonder, that God talk takes the upper hand of them all.⁴⁵ Bob Evans, an American songwriter for children, used clever songs to teach children the word of God. Bob, known as the Donut Man, related that, one day, while visiting a doughnut shop, realised that life without Jesus, is like a doughnut with a hole in the middle.⁴⁶ Evans found a concrete way of never allowing a child to pass through this emptiness. He made use of song, to give meaning to their existence. Therefore, song, presented with simple words from everyday life, became the medium to inspire the children to relate with Jesus and with others.

Jesus' friendly disposition is at the centre of a child's response. These responses become the experiences on which a child can build its life. Experience enables the child to build a new spiritual dimension. This results through the inner force of song. Here, the encounter with Jesus, occurs because of the purity and simplicity of the child's interior world. Thatcher speaks of this encounter as a gained knowledge of the external world, integrating with the world beyond our senses.⁴⁷ Hruby also manifests that when children are completely involved in song, then essence of faith becomes thrilling. It is capable of providing a sense of excitement in their religious experience.⁴⁸

Children love Bible stories because they are quite literally inspiring. Therefore, in Bible songs, children excite their minds, through thought and fantasy, which help them develop their faith. It is somewhat expedient for song to be based on the Word of God. Coles in fact, points out that Biblical stories can be expressed through

45. M. Robin, *Awe and Wonder In the Classroom*, (University of Durham School of Education; Durham 1984).

46. B. Evans, The Donut Man. <http://www.Donutmanmusic.Com.Html> 1998.

47. A. Thatcher, "A Critique of Inwardness in Religious Education", *British Journal of Religious Education* 14/1 (1991) 22-26.

48. D. Hruby, "What about children's choir?" *Pastoral Music in Practice: Children, Liturgy and Music* 2 (1990) 103-110.

song, because children tend to look inward as well as transcendental when singing through.⁴⁹

Song becomes the sacred element of reconciling the created world with the Creator, through internal harmonisation. Shepherd calls children 'parables of God'.⁵⁰ He highlights four salient qualities in which childhood is significant: creativity, sensuality, imagination and sacramentality. What is aimed at in Religious Education, becomes convergent in the power of song.⁵¹

Ronald Goldman's investigation indicates that Jesus is exceptional to children because He was kinder than other men and would never do anything to hurt anyone.⁵² In every song, a child needs to feel the vibrant and dynamic movement of Jesus during His Ministry, which pushed Him forward, from one place to another. It is a deep reality that, through song, children are touched by God in the mystical experience.⁵³ Religious songs must be liturgical and pasqual songs of joy, celebrating the Joy of the Life of Jesus.

The Joy of Jesus is the strongest energetic element that can raise a child's interest in keeping faith alive. Joy, then, is the golden thread that passes from one song to the other.

FINAL COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

There was great enjoyment during the singing. It was enhanced throughout by clapping and movement. There was indeed involvement, even for the least participant, who usually stays quietly in his place, hardly daring to move. Children were motivated to respond and they reacted in a delightful way, by the use of their voices, hands, arms and bodies. They were able to respond in their unique ways.

49. R. Coles, *The Spiritual life of Children*, (Harper Collins; London 1990).

50. T. Shepherd, "What does it mean to be a child?", *Pastoral Music in Practice: Children, Liturgy and Music 2* (1990) 71-78.

51. A.C. Henson, "The Church is a Transforming Agency in Post-Modern Society", *Journal of Religious Education* 92/1 (1997) 107-110.

52. R. Goldman, *Readiness for Religion: A Basis for Developmental Religious Education*, (Routledge & Kegan; London 1977).

53. N. Chvatal, "Music, Gestures, and Pictures - All for Children", *Pastoral Music in Practice: Children, Liturgy and Music 2* (1990) 65-70.

In so far as creativity and uniqueness are concerned, children are able to contrast the dynamics and textures of music and song.⁵⁴

The study has revealed significantly absorbing focal points, regarding means acquired through song. Most of this, is primarily due to the spontaneity of the children and in most cases, it recalls what knowledge the children have acquired so far. The children were able to transform their knowledge into a deep awareness of style and content. This, in itself was the stepping stone to form a sense of newness in every activity carried out.

Throughout the analysis, there is the involvement of wholeness. Children's behaviour is mingled with the regular impulsive mood of stimulation, which renders creativity original in its essence. Their delight in experimenting and responding to music and rhythm, creates a more authentic and genuine manner to spontaneity and impulsiveness. Furthermore, a musical description is maintained throughout to show the performance of the children in relation to the message.

Interviews have shown that songs 6 and 16 had the least response from the children (Table 2). Rhythm plays an important factor in this study. In fact, it was this issue that occasioned a few negative responses to rhythmic style and pattern. The children demonstrated a reality of choice, which in the child is normally inconsistent. This reality refers to the fact that the children adhered to one style of melody. They were unable to understand the importance of diversity. However, results have shown that these songs did not reach them fully. There was a lack in combination of proper diction and inner understanding which allows the creative expression of the child to integrate with the natural and emotional responses within.⁵⁵

With the introduction of songs in religious education, children have been given the opportunity to assist in creating movement to form their expressions of faith. It is definitely a great challenge to integrate song into the religious education classroom. It is therefore a means of developing greater insights in the spiritual formation of children.

54. P.J. Flowers, J. Wapnick & L. Ramsey, "Structured and Unstructured Musical Context and Children's Ability to Demonstrate Tempo and Dynamic Contrasts", *Journal of Music Education* 45/3 (1997) 97-115.

55. W.S. Campbell, L.J. Francis & W.K. Kay, *Research In Religious Education*, (Fowler Wright Books; England 1996).

Table 1: Classification of *Lejn il-Missier* for the purpose of this study and corresponding song titles

Duration No.	Liturgical Calendar	Chap. No.	Chapter Title	Song Title
Duration 1	Scholastic term Advent Christmas	1	Nilqghu lil Ġesù	Nilqa' lil Ġesù
		2	Ir-Rahal ta' Ġesù	Ġesù kien tifel bhali
		3	Il-Pajjiż ta' Ġesù	Il-pajjiż tieghi
		4	Ġesù jhalli r-rahall tieghu	Ix-xoghol ta' Ġesù
		5	Fil-Ġordan: Ġwanni jhejji t-triq	Iftu qalbkom
		6	Fil-Ġordan: Il-magħmudija ta' Ġesù	L-Ispirtu tal-Mulej fuqi
		7	F'Kana: L-ewwel miraklu	Ġesù jhobb lill-hbieb
		8	F'Kafarnahum: Jum fil-hajja ta' Ġesù	Kuljum ma' Ġesù
		9	F'Nazaret: Ġesù fis-sinagoga	Min Hu
		10	F'Nazaret: It-thabbira tal-Mulej	Marija
		11	F'Betlehem: Ġesù jitwieled għalina	Fahru l-Ġesù r-Re
Duration 2	Common cycle Lent Easter	12	F'Kafarnahum: Ġesù jfejjaq qaddej	Jien nemmen
		13	F'Kafarnahum: Ġesù jahfer id-dnubiet	Ejjeu nagħmlu hbieb
		14	F'Ġeriko: Ġesù jiltaqa' ma' Żakkew	Żakkew
		15	Fis-Samarija: Ġesù mal-lebbużi	Grazzi, grazzi
		16	F'Sikar: Ġesù mas-Samaritana	Il-hbieb speċjali tieghi
		17	F'Najn: Ġesù jqajjem żaġħżuġh	Mulej int tferrahni
		18	Fuq il-gholja: It-tagħlim ta' Ġesù	Hobb lill-Mulej
		19	Ġesù jgħallim bil-parabboli	Hallini nisma' storja
		20	Ġesù jagħżel 'l appostli	Il-hbieb ta' Ġesù
		21	F'Ġesarija: Ġesù jagħżel lil Pietru	Pietru ta' Ġesarija
		22	F'Ġerusalemm: Ġesù sultan tal-paċi	Osanna
		23	Fuq il-Kalvarju: Ġesù jmut għalina	Ġesù jhobbna
Duration 3	Resurrection Experience of Emmaus Appearances of Risen Christ Ascension	24	F'Ġerusalemm: Ġesù jqum mill-mewt	Alleluia, Ġesù qam
		25	F'Għemmaws: Ġesù ma' żewġ dixxipli	Il-kelma t'Alla f'qalbi
		26	F'Ġerusalemm: Ġesù jidher lid-dixxipli	Jien nagħtik il-paċi tieghi
		27	Fuq il-gholja taż-Żebbuġ: Ġesù tela' s-sema	Ġesù dejjem magħna
		28	Ma' Ġesù lejn il-Missier	L-aqwa habib

Table 2: Results obtained from interviews.

Song	Did you like the song? (% Yes)	Question 1	Answer 1	Question 2	Answer 2
1	100	What do you think about the song?	i. I enjoyed singing. ii. The words were easy. iii. I really liked the song.	What do you learn from the song?	i. Jesus always helps me; ii. Jesus is my friend; iii. I ask Him many things.
2*	95	So, you think the song was nice?	i. Yes I like it but I liked the other best. ii. Yes I like it.	What did Jesus do as a child?	i. Jesus used to play like me. ii. He used to play and run. iii. Jesus loved to play.
4	93	What do you remember from the song?	i. It was nice. ii. I enjoyed it most when we sang. iii. Jesus went everywhere. iv. Jesus wanted to meet everyone. v. Jesus wanted to tell everyone how much he loved them. vi. Jesus had to tell everyone why he came.		
6	68	Did you like the song?	i. I liked it but it was slow. ii. I did not like it much because it made me sad. iii. So and so, it was a bit iv. The words were difficult.	What happened at the Baptism of Jesus?	i. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus. ii. I think that Jesus needed the Holy Spirit. iii. Jesus loved the Holy Spirit a lot. iv. Jesus needed the Holy Spirit to help the people.
7	86	Why did Jesus do the miracle of Cana?	i. He made great things. ii. I know that Jesus loves me a lot. iii. The teacher tells us that Jesus is our greatest friend. iv. Jesus loves everyone. v. Jesus wants us happy. vi. Jesus came to make us happy.	Did you like the music?	i. I enjoyed singing. ii. It seems like the first one we sang. iii. I like it because it makes you move. iv. I like it because it makes you happy. v. I like it because you sing the word 'Hobbni'.

10	100	What can you tell me about	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. I enjoyed singing. ii. I saw the angel talking to Mary. iii. Mary kept quiet, listening. iv. I think that Mary always did what God wanted of her. v. The angel was good with Mary, because he spoke gently. 		
11	100	Do you feel something beautiful when you sing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The song is really beautiful. ii. I feel happy when I sing it. iii. I enjoy singing with my ... iv. All the children enjoyed themselves, even the teacher. 	What is the thing you liked most?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The best part I like was 'Kantaw'. ii. I felt near Jesus. iii. I want to sing it to Baby Jesus. iv. Jesus will surely be pleased with it.
12**	82	What do you think about the song?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. It was a bit slow for me. ii. It made me a bit sad. iii. Well, it wasn't bad. iv. I felt a bit ... well. 	Why did you not like it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. It's better the other. ii. The other was very beautiful ... fast like I like them. iii. I enjoyed more singing the other one. iv. It bothered me a bit.
13	89	How was the song?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. It was good. ii. I liked it. iii. It was not bad. iv. It wasn't fast, but I liked it just the same. 	If you were instead of Jesus, what would do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. I do like Jesus. ii. No, I do not make peace. iii. Perhaps after, yes. iv. But I do not like it. v. If he does not come himself, I won't speak to him.
14	100	Did you like the music?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. It's the one I like most. ii. I enjoyed it a lot, because it was like a disco song. iii. Oh, I sang a lot. iv. I really enjoyed myself, singing 'Zakkew'. 	How did you feel when we dramatised and sang 'Zakkew'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Jesus was with us, you know, He spoke to Zaccheus. ii. I was like Zaccheus, singing iii. I felt as if I was Jesus, telling Zaccheus to come down from the tree.

Table 2: Results obtained from interviews. (Contd.)

Song	Did you like the song? (% Yes)	Question 1	Answer 1	Question 2	Answer 2
15	91	Did you ever say thank you to Jesus?	i. Everyday I say thank you to Jesus. ii. Jesus gave me lots of things, and so I tell him thank you. iii. Before I sleep, I say thank you to Jesus. iv. Sometimes I do say, thank you, ... because I forget.	How do you say thank you to Jesus?	i. Sometimes before I eat, I sing it. ii. I enjoyed singing "Grazzi". iii. When I say thank you Jesus, I sing it to him. iv. Now, I have taught it to my mother, so that we sing it together.
16	70	How did you feel during singing?	i. I did not like it much. ii. I slept. iii. Well, it was slow.	Whose friend is Jesus?	i. Jesus is a friend to everyone. ii. Jesus is a great friend. iii. Jesus is always with me and